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## THE HOLY GRAIL AND SANSKRIT NATURE-MYTHS.

L. von Schroeder, *Die Vollendung des arischen Mysteriums in Bayreuth*, Munich, 1911, 258 pp. Also von Schroeder's articles on the same subject: "Der arische Naturkult, als Grundlage der Sage vom heiligen Gral". Reprint from *Bayreuther Blätter*, 1911; "Die Wurzeln der Sage vom heiligen Gral", *Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Acad. d. Wiss. phil-hist. Kl.*, Bd. 166. Abt. 2, (1910).

Professor von Schroeder's book has the advantage of a wide outlook. Its author, who is a well-known orientalist, and comparative mythologist, draws parallels from Sanskrit, Greek, Slavic, and other languages not always brought into Grail studies. Von Schroeder's views with regard to the immediate origin of the Grail legend are judicious and in accordance with the best opinion. He sees clearly that the Grail cannot be of purely Christian origin, but must have resulted from a fusion of heathen and Christian elements. He indeed uses to characterize the composite character of the Grail tradition (not without a passing comment on its inordinate length) the adjective "kelto-romano-germanisch-indisch-christlich" (p. 144), and thus definitely places himself among those who believe that the Grail-complex is woven together out of many strands.

Among points which the theory of a purely Christian origin will not explain, von Schroeder mentions;<sup>1</sup> the long and difficult search which is necessary to find the Grail; the other-world character of the Castle itself, which associates it, he thinks, with the land of the dead; the mysterious question which the Grail seeker must ask; and finally the way in which the success of the Grail winner restores fertility to the land.

He might have added that the shape-shifting powers of the Grail King,<sup>2</sup> are well-nigh impossible to explain by the purely Christian theory; that this theory cannot account for the sword of the Grail castle, which is prominent in all of the oldest versions except that of Boron; and finally that nobody has ever heard of any Christian legend having been secularized in the middle ages and made into a semi-heathen affair, although the contrary thing, the fusion of a heathen tale with a Christian idea, and the consequent loss of most of the heathen coloring is quite usual.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Die Wurzeln", pp. 78, 82f.

<sup>2</sup> *Perceval*, ed. Potvin, v. 222.

<sup>3</sup> The latest attempt to urge a purely Christian origin for the Grail legend, that of Miss Peebles, in her Bryn Mawr Dissertation, (*The Legend of Longinus*, etc., Bryn Mawr, Pa., pp. 166-220), gets on by ignoring the above difficulties. Her argument which will have no weight with

Von Schroeder believes in the existence of Kiot,<sup>1</sup> from whom he thinks Wolfram borrowed almost the whole of his account of the Grail. He admits the possibility of Kiot's having combined some features of oriental origin with a primitive Celtic story. He is even willing to see some force in Iselin's<sup>2</sup> suggestion of the Syriac "Shatzhöhle", although he would by no means regard that as an important source.

He is firmly persuaded that the Grail legend is of Celtic growth and that in it heathen Celtic ideas have been fused with Christian ceremonial. Against the historic tradition which ascribes the origin of the Grail legend to the Celts, von Schroeder is certainly right in believing that there are no facts that can make effective opposition.<sup>3</sup> All nations have their vessels of plenty, but the Celts have not merely the vessels of plenty, but the tone and atmosphere of the whole story. In all versions the Grail is connected with the Celtic hero, King Arthur. Perceval is "li gallois". Only from the Celtic could the legend have appeared precisely in the way that it did in the twelfth century.

The main conclusion of von Schroeder's book is that the Aryan race, though separated for five thousand years, finds in Wagner's operas at Bayreuth the complete realization of its primitive drama, which in turn was based on a primitive cult of sun and moon. His conclusion rests on parallels drawn from stories of all dates belonging to widely scattered Aryan peoples.

The method is a terribly difficult one, and the reader has a right to require from the comparative mythologist the keen-

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specialists, runs in brief thus: The theory of purely Christian origin will explain very many of the features of the Grail legend, *ergo*, it must explain them all. But clearly the test of a theory is the things it will not explain. The ordinary reader may be led astray, for Miss Peebles omits to mention any of the difficulties. She is chiefly concerned to prove the Christian character of the spear, but she fails to mention that of the three oldest versions of the Grail legend (Chrétien, 1175c, Boron, 1200c, Wolfram, 1210c), precisely the one which is most influenced by Christianity, omits the spear altogether. It is not possible that Boron should have omitted the spear, had it been in origin, as Miss Peebles says, the spear of Longinus. The theory of a fusion of heathen talismans with Christian symbols meets well-nigh all difficulties, and is, therefore, the only theory that has any real standing.

<sup>1</sup> "Die Wurzeln", p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> L. E. Iselin, *Der morgenländische Ursprung der Grallegende*, Halle, 1909. Traces of oriental influence do not appear in the oldest versions, (Chrétien, 1175c, and Wauchier, who, though he wrote later, probably preserves a more archaic story). They begin in Boron, 1200c, but chiefly in Wolfram, 1210c. Oriental influences can, therefore, have been only of subsidiary force in the growth of the Grail legend, not as Iselin thinks, the basis of the story.

<sup>3</sup> "Derarische Naturkult", p. 1, 8; "Die Wurzeln", p. 60.

est discrimination, and the most carefully poised judgment. Professor von Schroeder does not always display a sufficiently cool head to inspire us with complete confidence. Among unguarded ideas in his book are:

1. The exasperatingly frequent recurrence of portions of the established ritual used by worshippers of Wagner. Let Wagner's name be mentioned, and nothing will serve but a "Te Deum Laudamus". Wagner's dramas are perfect, and no flaw or weakness in anything the master wrote or thought is hinted at. They are the completion of everything artistic that the Aryan people have ever striven for, and are faultless in every particular.

2. Von Schroeder has not been at the pains to gain a first-hand knowledge of the oldest forms of the Grail legend (in Old French). He makes all his quotations at second hand from Birch-Hirschfeld, Heinzel, Wechssler, etc. As a direct consequence of this he uses in drawing his parallels not a conception of the Grail legend derived solely from the oldest known sources (Chrétien, perhaps Wauchier, Boron, Wolfram), which is obviously the safe thing to do, but an eclectic notion of the Grail derived in part from later Grail romances. Thus his argument is weakened to a degree difficult to determine.

3. For the Sanskrit end of his comparison von Schroeder employs, not a single well-defined story, or even two or three stories having the same hero, and found in closely related documents, but a large number of tales collected widely from Sanskrit literature, some from the ancient *Rigveda*, others from the *Mahābhārata*, which may not be much older than the Grail legend itself. Here again his argument lacks tangibility.

The numerous parallels which von Schroeder cites make plain that ancient Aryan peoples had mythical stories about culture heroes, who brought from the land of the gods precious objects for the use of man. It is also clear that the Grail story bears some resemblance to this type of myth. The chief points of resemblance between Sanskrit story and the Legend of the Holy Grail seem to be as follows:

1. The Grail castle is in an almost inaccessible place, which may be identified with the otherworld, or the land of spirits. In the Sanskrit story the talismans are frankly brought from heaven, or from the region of the gods. But this parallel becomes less impressive as soon as one recalls that all peoples have stories of treasure supposed to have been brought from the spirit land.

2. The Grail in several stories floats mysteriously in the air. The Sanskrit magic dish, containing soma, which was

originally identified with the moon, would naturally be represented as floating in the air. It is to be noted, however, that the Sanskrit stories describing the dish do not seem to speak of it as floating. In connection with this should be observed something that von Schroeder did not notice, viz., that the bleeding lance is sometimes represented as floating in the air.<sup>1</sup> Von Schroeder seeks an origin for the bleeding lance in lightning, or the thunderbolt of the gods. Possibly he would explain the floating of the lance by the appearance of lightning in the air, but to make association between the darting lightning and the calm floating of the bleeding lance seems far fetched. It is more likely that these passages about the lance prove the commonness of the idea of floating in the air, which might become ascribed to any marvelous object. If so, the whole notion that the floating of the Grail connects it with the moon dish of the east is far fetched. In the oldest known forms of the Grail story (Chrétien, Boron, Wolfram) neither Grail nor lance floats, but is carried in procession.

3. In the story of "Rishyacringa" occurs a hero who is, as von Schroeder says, "a pure fool like Perceval" [In the oldest versions, Chrétien, Wauchier, however, Perceval is not "a pure fool"], who marries the daughter of a king, and by so doing restores fertility to his wasted land. But the "Rishyacringa" is not in the *Rigveda*, and is not directly connected with the winning of a heavenly dish. It seems doubtful, therefore, whether the resemblances between the stories of Rishyacringa and Perceval are sufficient to prove that they belong originally to the same type.

Von Schroeder's method is to strip the Grail legend of nearly all its peculiar features, leaving only what he regards as its central idea, and then to find parallels to this simple idea in all Aryan lands. His central idea is so lacking in characteristics that parallels to it may be found almost anywhere. He fails to convince us that the oriental story and the Grail legend are really at bottom the same thing. We feel that they may be based on somewhat different conceptions, and that the resemblances which he thinks fundamental may be accidental and adventitious. It is fair, I think, to say that von Schroeder's method strips the Grail of nearly all its peculiar features. He equates the Grail with the wonderful mill, which grinds out anything you want. For example, in the Märchen the mill that ground out salt, and could not be stopped. Surely to identify the Grail with the mill, one has to reduce the ideas to very simple terms. In another place

<sup>1</sup> E. g. in the "Demanda del Sancto Grial", *Nueva Bib.*, ed. Bonilla, VI, 110.

he says that the search for the Grail is really the same idea as the search for the treasure of the Nibelungen. When the Grail story is regarded as merely a quest for a valuable object, parallel stories spring up all over the world, not merely in Aryan lands, but among American Indians,<sup>1</sup> and in far-off Australian islands.

Although von Schroeder may have failed to establish a fundamental connection between Sanskrit story and the Legend of the Holy Grail, he has brought forward a large number of somewhat analogous stories from many Aryan lands, and he has made it probable that the quest of the Holy Grail belongs to the general class of stories which deal with the bringing of celestial treasure for the service of man. In doing this von Schroeder has performed a considerable service, and he might have avoided most of the objections to his book if he had said clearly somewhere that he was not expecting to prove a definite connection between the legend of the Grail and the various quest stories which he has outlined. These stories are illustrative and may help to define what was the kernel of the legend in the minds of its Celtic narrators.

The parallels cited by von Schroeder perhaps slightly strengthen the idea that the kernel of the Grail story was a culture myth. It has been urged with eagerness by Miss Weston<sup>2</sup> that the Grail legend originated in the initiation ceremony of some forgotten agrarian cult. The initiation idea as she shows, correlates the mysterious question, the restoration of fertility to the land, and several minor points which are otherwise hard to explain. Von Schroeder, in defending the idea of a cult, to which he has also arrived, says nothing about testimony from modern secret societies or from modern followers of the occult, to which Miss Weston gives a large place. This is wise, for to argue as Miss Weston does, because modern societies have ceremonials resembling that of the Grail, that from similar ceremonies the Grail legend must be derived, is very hazardous. In view of the great popularity of the Grail stories for centuries, it is *a priori* more likely that the ritual of the secret societies has been influenced by the mysterious Grail romances.

Von Schroeder likewise avoids another hazardous assumption.

<sup>1</sup> Compare the Cheyenne Indian story of the hero "Mutsiiuiv", who conveyed to his tribe from the spirit land buffalo-cap and "medicine-arrows". His visit restored fertility to their land, and the talismans brought back the herds of buffalo. G. B. Grinnell, *Jour. of Am. Folk-Lore*, XXI, 269 f. (1908).

<sup>2</sup> *The Grail and the Rites, of Adonis*, *Folk-Lore*, XVIII, (1907); *The Legend of Sir Perceval*, II, 249f., (1909).

tion made by Miss Weston,<sup>1</sup> viz., that some of the mediaeval narrators of the Grail legend (e. g. Boron) understood that it reflected the rites of a secret cult, and were aware of the occult meaning of the symbols Grail and spear.<sup>2</sup>

I am not yet convinced that the Grail legend sprang from the initiation ceremonies of a cult. In the oldest forms of the legend (Chrétien, Wauchier, Wolfram), a basis in some *Märchen* telling of a strife between wizard families which was carried on by means of supernatural talismans seems rather to be suggested. This *Märchen* might, so far as I can see, be older, and cult influence have operated later, if at all. The strife of kinsmen, distinctly pictured in the English *Syr Percyvelle*, which probably represents an extremely primitive form of the story,<sup>3</sup> and mentioned in *Diu Crône*, v. 29497f., is hard to reconcile with an initiation ceremony, however excellently the latter may explain the mysterious question. A doubt suggested by Huet (*Romania*, XXXIX, 102, 1910) also seems to me to demand more evidence. Did agrarian cults like that of Adonis which represented the vegetable deity in human form, flourish among the Celts? Their existence seems not to have been demonstrated except at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. It is evident that we are still some distance from a solution of the Grail problem. Let us be thankful for the additional parallels which von Schroeder has collected. They are interesting and if considered coolly need not mislead us.

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<sup>1</sup> *Legend of Sir Perceval*, II. 315.

<sup>2</sup> The agrarian cult idea is presented in a thoughtful argument which avoids the extra-hazardous methods of Miss Weston by Professor W. A. Nitze, "The Fisher King in the Grail Romances", *P. M. L. A.* XXIV, 365 (1909). Parallels are here drawn between the Grail ceremony and the Eleusinian mysteries.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. R. H. Griffith's dissertation, *Sir Perceval of Galles*, Chicago, (1911), although clogged with a mass of exasperatingly useless details, has valuable pages in its Chapter III, which tend to show that *Syr Percyvelle* is derived from something older than Chrétien. This view is also upheld by Strucks, *Der junge Parzival*, Münster dissertation, 1910.

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DAS SCHWACHE PRÄTERITUM UND SEINE VORGESCHICHTE, von Hermann Collitz, Professor of Germanic Philology, Johns Hopkins University. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1912. Pp. XVI and 256. (*Hesperia*, Schriften zur germanischen Philologie herausgegeben von Hermann Collitz, Nr. 1.)

The aim of this new periodical is given in the opening words of the preface: Die Sammlung, deren erstes Heft hiermit aus-